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S E C R E T DJIBOUTI 001644

SIPDIS

NOFORN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/04/2013

TAGS: [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [MOPS](#) [DJ](#)

SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI: TERRORIST DOES NOT MATERIALIZE, BUT DRILL SUGGESTS STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF CURRENT EMBASSY COOPERATION WITH OTHER USG ELEMENTS

Classified By: Charge d'affaires Tim Smith for reason 1.5 (b,d).

**¶11.** (SBU) Because of the request for an immediate report, we have been unable to reach non-State offices for clearance. For this reason, this cable is less detailed and shorter than a full report would be.

**¶12.** (S) Summary: Thursday, September 4, Combined Joint Task Force/Horn of Africa (CJTF/HOA), housed at Camp Lemonier on the southern end of Djibouti's Ambouli International Airport, prepared for the possible apprehension of one of East Africa's most prominent terrorists, the Al Qaeda leader associated with the Embassy bombings in 1998 and Mombassa attack of 2002. CJTF actions included an evacuation drill which removed most of the camp's personnel to areas outside the compound in order to lower the potential death toll of a September 11-type suicide plane attack on the base. Special Forces units mobilized to assist Djiboutian authorities in the possible orderly capture of a high-level Al Qaeda operative, or to deal with a hostage situation or prolonged standoff. AmEmbassy Djibouti assisted CJTF by obtaining President Ismail Omar Guelleh's permission for the proposed operations and the President's instruction to Djiboutian security forces to follow the directions of CTFJ and the Embassy Regional Affairs officer in case of an operation at the airport.(End Summary)

**¶13.** (S) Intelligence received by CJTF at 11:45 suggested that Kenyan citizen Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan, the Al Qaeda leader believed to have had direct links with all three successful terrorist attacks in Kenya, would be departing on a commercial flight from Mogadishu. Because of the possibility that Nabhan might be planning a suicide bombing attempt on the approximately 1700 American military personnel stationed at Lemonier, CJTF/HOA Commander Brigadier General Mastin Robeson ordered an evacuation drill to take all but a skeleton crew out of the danger zone of a direct hit during the scheduled arrival times for the three commercial flights (3:00 to 4:30 pm).

**¶14.** (S) While the Station Chief and CJTF worked with Djiboutian security forces to prepare for Nabhan's apprehension or hostage standoff, American Embassy officers worked through the President's Qat-impaired aides to obtain Guelleh's personal approval of the arrest of Nabhan and his order to Djiboutian security forces to support the American plan. However, Nabhan did not arrive on any of the flights, and the operation stood down at approximately 5:30 pm.

**¶15.** (S) Conclusion: CJTF forced were able to respond quickly to implement their plan. Despite some initial difficulties with communications, we were equally effective in getting Presidential permission for the operation. While permission probably would have been possible after the fact, Post believes that our effort was important for maintaining Guelleh's complete support for the Global War on Terrorism. Tomorrow's (September 5) after-action meeting will prepare a report and allow all parties the opportunity to work off some of the rougher edges.

SMITH